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TAGS: PREL KWBG KPAL KPO UNSC IS LE SY
SUBJECT: UNSC: OPEN DEBATE ON THE MIDDLE EAST CONTINUES
FOCUS ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY AND HIZBALLAH WEAPONS
IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

REF: A. STATE 77743
1B. USUN NEW YORK 721

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Assistant-Secretary-General for Political Affairs (A/SG) Oscar Fernandez-Taranco briefed the Security Council during its monthly meeting on the Middle East on July 27. He focused his briefing on continuing Israeli settlement activity, the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and the efforts of the U.S. and the Quartet. While emphasizing that Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem undermined confidence in a two-state solution, he noted that Israel had implemented measures to ease movement for Palestinians in the West Bank. He also recognized the Palestinian Authority's (PA) reform agenda. He recalled the Secretary-General's statement that the situation in Gaza was unsustainable, called for Israel to open Gaza's border crossings, and reiterated that Security Council resolution 1860 remains the way forward in Gaza. Fernandez-Taranco also highlighted the June Quartet meeting in Trieste, Italy, and the efforts of U.S. Special Envoy George Mitchell.

¶2. (SBU) Summary Cont'd: All 15 Council members and an additional 23 non-Council members spoke during the open debate, including Israel and the Palestinian Observer. Most delegations cited opportunities arising from U.S. diplomatic efforts, President Obama's Cairo speech, the Arab League's recommitment to the Arab Peace Initiative and Egypt's push for intra-Palestinian reconciliation. All statements called on Israel to halt its settlement activities, and most described settlements as obstacles to peace. Delegations also noted the urgency of resuming negotiations based on relevant UNSC resolutions, land for peace, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative; the need for Palestinian reconciliation; and, the need to open Gaza's borders for humanitarian and construction materials. The Israeli Permanent Representative focused her remarks on Hezbollah and the arms cache incident (ref. B), and drew attention to the danger posed by Iran. The Palestinian Observer welcomed "the more active, balanced approach" of the Obama administration, but noted that despite Palestinian concessions, Israel has not upheld its commitments. The Lebanese Charge condemned Israel for destabilizing Lebanon and the region, refuted Israeli statements about (Hezbollah) arms smuggling in southern Lebanon, and requested that UNIFIL's mandate be renewed without changes. Arab states and others criticized Israel's blockade of Gaza, continuing settlement activity and home demolitions in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, with many calling for Israel to be held accountable for violations of international law. European States focused on humanitarian access in Gaza and the exhaustibility of donor funds to the Palestinians. End summary.

Positive engagement tempered
by on-the-ground realities

¶3. (SBU) In his first briefing to the Council as Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, recognized the international community's concerted efforts to create conditions for the resumption of negotiations on the two-state solution, pointed to the Quartet's meeting in Trieste, Italy in June, the efforts of the U.S. Special Envoy George Mitchell, and the ministerial Arab League meeting on the Arab Peace Initiative. He emphasized the Quartet's agreement that both Israel and the Palestinians must implement their obligations under the Road Map. He also recalled that Arab ministers welcomed President Obama's commitment to peace in the region, and "a new beginning for United States relations with the Arab and Muslim world" in their June 24 meeting in Cairo.

¶4. (SBU) Fernandez-Taranco said that Israeli's home evictions, demolitions and construction in East Jerusalem increased tensions and undermined confidence in a two-state solution. He expressed concern over plans for the construction of 20 new Israeli housing units in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem. He noted outbreaks of settler violence in the West Bank and lamented Israel's inadequate enforcement of the rule of law regarding violent settlers. Despite these setbacks, Fernandez-Taranco said Israel is implementing measures to facilitate movement in the West Bank, thereby reducing the time required for Palestinians to access some towns in the West Bank, and he assessed that if this policy is sustained and expanded, the potential for economic growth in the West Bank would greatly increase. He recognized the ambitious reform agenda of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and highlighted the PA's improving security apparatus with the planned opening of five new police stations in Jenin. Overall, he noted, the situation

in the West Bank had been calm. In Gaza, he said that Security Council resolution 1860 "remained the way forward," that the drop in violence from the previous reporting period had carried into the present period, and that all of Gaza's crossings must open. He said that the Secretary-General had shared his assessment of Gaza with the Quartet: that the situation is unsustainable and not in the interests of any of those concerned. He noted that UNRWA had opened more than 150 summer camps in Gaza, with over 185,000 children in attendance, and that UNDP had begun to clear more than 600,000 of rubble remaining from the Gaza hostilities. On Lebanon, Fernandez-Taranco recalled that the investigations into violations of resolution 1701, following the explosion of an arms cache in Khirbat Salim, were ongoing. He also said the situation in the Syrian Golan was quiet, although settlement activity continued.

Council Members

¶5. (SBU) All 15 Council members called on Israel to stop its settlement activity, reiterated their support for the prompt resumption of negotiations on the two-state solution, and recognized that both Israel and the Palestinians must fulfill their obligations under the Road Map. The U.K. called for a halt of Israeli construction, saying that such settlements were contrary to the two-state solution and against international law. The U.K. was encouraged by Arab states readiness to normalize relations with Israel. Russia said the blockade on Gaza was unacceptable and that "we consider inadmissible actions that could prejudge final status negotiations," a reference to Israel's actions in East Jerusalem. Russia also reminded members of its plans to hold an international conference on the Middle East in Moscow this year, which several other delegations echoed. France said that improvements need to be made in the daily living conditions of Palestinians, especially with regard to access and movement. In this, France called for an immediate opening of Israeli checkpoints to encourage a more normal life for Palestinians. In welcoming the initiative of President Obama, France said, "Rarely has there been such an interest in concluding a peace deal."

16. Ambassador Wolff delivered the U.S. statement (see ref. A), reminding members that all parties--Arabs and Israelis alike--had their respective responsibilities to uphold. He pointed again to the weapons cache that exploded in Southern Lebanon and noted the violation of UNSC resolution 1701.

17. (SBU) Austria, Croatia, Mexico and Japan said they were encouraged by President Obama's efforts to move the peace process forward. Japan said such efforts were creating conditions "not seen in a long time," but that the U.S. cannot shoulder the burden alone; Japan called on all member states to lend their support to U.S. efforts. Council members also reaffirmed that talks must resume on the basis of relevant UNSC resolutions, land-for-peace, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. Libya was the only Council member not to discuss the peace process. Instead, Libya said the situation in Gaza had deteriorated since Israel's "massacre," that Israel's lack of desire to end the blockade of Gaza was a war crime, and that Israel was applying policies to "Judaize" Jerusalem.

Israel and Palestinian Observer

18. (SBU) The Israeli Perm Rep focused her remarks on the explosion of the arms depot in Khirbat Salim, in southern Lebanon, and the dangers of Hamas, Hizballah and Iran. She cited portions of a Khirbat Salim resident's letter decrying Hizballah's actions that appeared in Al-Mustaqbal newspaper on July 16. The letter detailed a Lebanese villager's disgust at Hizballah, and highlighted the dangers posed by Hizballah's storage of illegal weapons near civilian areas. She underlined that the Khirbat Salim incident, a grave violation of Security resolution 1701, "demonstrates to the world the volatile reality on the ground" and underscored that Hizballah's breach of Council demands "are indicative of the danger posed to our region by Iran," and that "from Southern Lebanon to Gaza, the arming, training and financing of terrorism bear the same certificate of origin: Tehran." Israel desires peace, she stressed, and continues to call for the immediate resumption of a political dialogue with the Palestinian Authority. She noted the steps taken to improve Palestinian movement in the West Bank and the Palestinian economy, including the dismantlement or extension of the hours of passage for 152 roadblocks, the creation of an industrial zone in Jenin, an agricultural export venture in

Jericho, and a tourist infrastructure project along the Jordan river.

19. (SBU) The Palestine Observer welcomed "the more active, balanced approach" of the Obama administration, but noted that despite Palestinian concessions, Israel has not upheld its commitments. He said that the President Obama's Cairo speech and the diplomatic efforts of Special Envoy George Mitchell have "renewed hopes in the vast potential of responsible, fair United States leadership." However, he underscored that the situation in the Occupied Territories and East Jerusalem remains grave and the peace process frozen. He said that Israel has undermined confidence and progress by "illegal, destructive and unilateral measures prejudicing the outcome of negotiations on the core final status issues--Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, borders, security and water." He remarked that Israel's credibility as a peace partner is in question, that characterizing Israeli acceptance of the two-State solution as a concession should be rejected, and that Israel must be accountable for war crimes.

Lebanon's prickly intervention

110. (SBU) The Lebanese Charge said that each step the international community takes for a Palestinian state, Israel introduces its own definition of that state and imposes its

own conditions. She rhetorically asked who will defend Palestine, its people, the rights of refugees to return, Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the peace process. She said that Israel violates resolution 1701 on a daily basis and called for an immediate stop to Israel's overflights. Israel destabilizes Lebanon and threatens peace and stability in the region, she said, as evidenced by the dismantling of Israeli spy networks in Lebanon and Israel's incomplete and delayed information on locations of cluster munitions from the July 2006 war. She said that the Security Council needs to be aware of Israel's attempts to change the status quo in southern Lebanon through creating facts along the Blue Line and "provocations." Regarding the incident in Khirbat Salim, she said a joint United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) investigation is underway and that "preliminary information of the investigation showed that arms and ammunitions found were remnants of the July 2006 war." She underlined that Lebanon rejects "any accusations launched by Israel of arms smuggling into UNIFIL's area of operation." She reminded Council members of the GOLs request to renew UNIFIL for one year without any changes "either in the mandate or in any relevant rules and concepts of operation."

Others offer some signs of hope amid virulent criticism of Israel

¶11. (SBU) Arab States (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Syria, Tunisia), Cuba, Iran, Malaysia and Nicaragua criticized Israeli actions in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and called for Israel to be held accountable for violations of international law. Arab States recalled the Arab League's recommitment to the Arab Peace Initiative and recognized Egypt's efforts at intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Many Arab states said Israel continues to "Judaize" East Jerusalem and noted Israeli "spy networks" in Lebanon. Syria said that "occupied Jerusalem is experiencing the most painful moment in its history" and that Israeli leaders' "hostile declarations" are "counter to peace." Qatar said Israel should be held accountable for its war crimes in Gaza and the continued suffering of civilians, remarking that "we must expose the truth of human rights violations." Iran rejected Israel's "baseless and absurd allegations," and said that Israel is a danger to the world with nuclear weapons.

¶12. (SBU) The Swedish Perm Rep, speaking on behalf of the EU, welcomed the U.S. administration's commitment to pursue a two-state solution and called on Israel to halt its settlement activities. He called for full implementation of resolution 1860, for the Palestinians to advance reconciliation efforts, and for Arab countries to assist the PA both politically and financially. Norway emphasized that donor funds cannot last forever, saying "without a political endgame in clear view, donor commitment at current levels can hardly be sustained." Switzerland spoke about the need for a concerted effort to put in place a mechanism for humanitarian access and reconstruction in Gaza.

¶13. (U) Note: A verbatim record of the meeting is available on the Security Council section of the UN website,